

## IRAN'S POLICIES DURING WORLD WAR II

policy, political divisions among the Iranian press were still not clearly denned as late as 1943. Gradually, however, a change took place. By the fall of 1944 the oil crisis between Iran and Russia provoked greater crystallization of political opinions. The press aligned itself either with pro-Soviet or pro-British sentiment, and started to discuss foreign policy issues, In time the Iranian press became the most sensitive barometer of Russo-Western relations in this part of the world. The artificial truce was broken, and in the winter of 1944-1945 the press began to indulge in open attacks against Great Britain and Russia. Somewhat earlier two press camps were established: the Freedom Front, a pro-Soviet coalition of newspapers created in 1943, and the Independence Front, a nationalist and pro-British journalistic coalition grouped around Zia ed-Din.

Any discussion of the press during the war period should include the question of its influence on political life. In this instance the reply is that the role of the press was somewhat similar to the role of political parties. With very few exceptions an individual newspaper did not exert significant influence, but the effect of approximately fifty dailies and periodicals, taken as a whole, could not be ignored. The press played an important role as a supplier of news and as a molder of public opinion. And public opinion, even in a country with as much illiteracy as Iran, was not a negligible factor. True, a backward peasant of Farsistan or a nomad of Luristan was quite oblivious to what the newspapermen in Teheran might write and, of course, his traditional way of life could not be affected by it. But the newspapers were not destined to serve him. They were addressed

to the town population. Teheran, a metropolitan center, numbered 700,000 inhabitants, Tabriz around 350,000. Isfahan with its textile industries, Meshed, Hamadan, and Shiraz constituted important population centers. In these towns literacy was greater than in the villages. Merchants, traders, artisans, government employees, policemen, soldiers, and a number of workers were anxious to read the news. The wide-spread custom of reading a book or a newspaper aloud to a number of people by an accidental or planted "lector" increased the number of news consumers. It may safely be asserted that the material printed in these fifty-odd papers was ultimately penetrating the consciousness not only of the educated but also of the masses in the big cities. After